

Just One Question

Surveys focusing on digital delivery over Covid-19

About

Just One Question is a weekly survey launched in May 2020 by the Centre for Youth Impact to help understand and build a picture of the challenges, needs, and concerns faced by those working with young people in the UK, through the pandemic crisis and beyond. The survey provides an opportunity to directly receive feedback from those working with young people at grassroots level, with weekly questions covering a wide range of topics such as evaluation needs, training obstacles, barriers to delivery, experience of work, and quality of provision.

Anyone working with and for young people in the UK can register to take part in the survey at <https://youthimpact.app>. One question is shared each week, to which respondents can respond with between one to three pre-set answers or a 'something else' response, along with any additional comments. After submitting a response, users can receive immediate feedback on how peers in the sector have responded. The surveys below received around 50-80 responses each. For more information, please visit the [#justonequestion website](#) or email hello@youthimpact.uk.

Insights

With a great amount of youth work provision shifting online in the wake of lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the #justonequestion surveys have provided insight on youth practitioners' experiences of digital delivery. Below, we summarise some of the key reflections and insights that have emerged from these surveys over the past year. These summaries have been shortened - for the full commentary, please visit the website linked above.

[25 March 2021: What training would be most beneficial to you right now?](#)

[24 July 2020: What training would be most beneficial to you right now?](#)

[18 March 2021: When face to face work is permitted again, do you intend to keep any of your provision online?](#)

[4 March 2021: Has digital delivery widened your geographical reach?](#)

[19 February 2021: Are there any features of your remote provision that are working better than face-to-face delivery?](#)

[5 February 2021: Are the young people you work with experiencing 'digital fatigue'?](#)

[25 September 2021: Has moving your provision online enabled you to reach/engage young people that you have never engaged before?](#)

[29 May 2020: How consistent has engagement with your online offer been since lockdown started?](#)

[22 May 2020: Compared to what is typical with your offline engagement, what is engagement with your online offer like?](#)

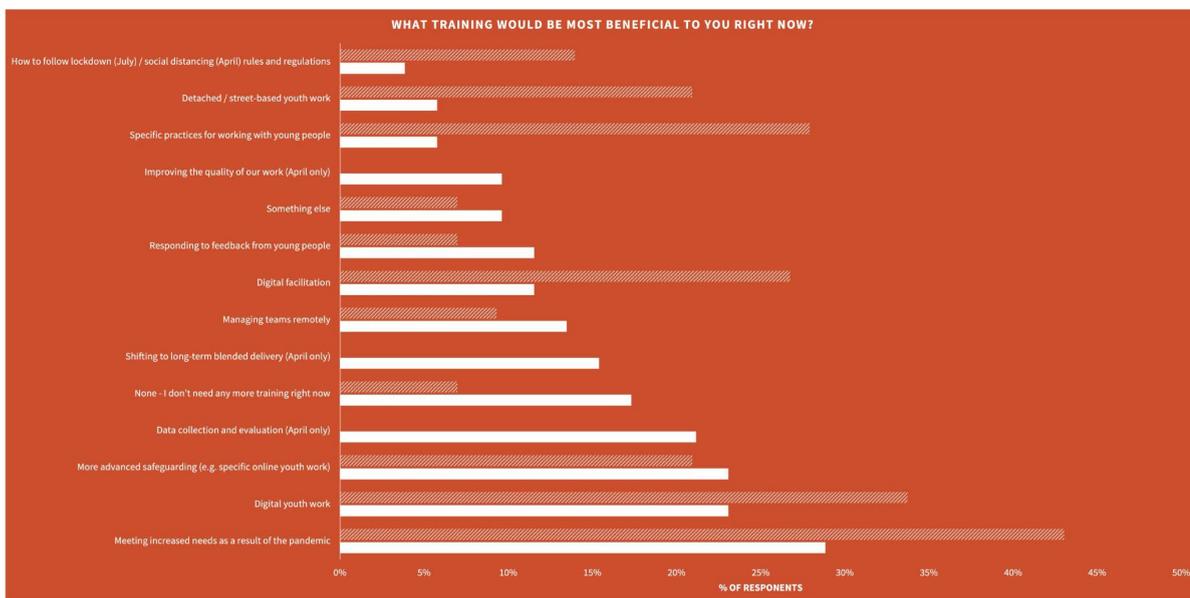
[15 May 2020: What is the biggest challenge that you are facing in moving your delivery online?](#)

25 March 2021: What training would be most beneficial to you right now?

24 July 2020: What training would be most beneficial to you right now?

We ran this survey twice - initially in July 2020, when multiple studies and surveys had highlighted a need for increased training for practitioners who were adapting, rapidly, to the new context of youth work delivery. Eight months on from this, we were interested in what had changed:

- Key priorities remained the same - the two most popular responses at both time points were meeting young people's increased needs as a result of the pandemic and **digital youth work**. A greater proportion of all respondents selected these answers in the first survey, however.
- Confidence in other areas had shifted. In April 2021, fewer practitioners expressed a need for training about how to follow social distancing rules and regulations (14% to 4%), detached or street-based youth work (21% to 6%), and specific practices for working with young people, e.g. creating safe spaces (28% to 6%). **There's also notably less demand for training in digital facilitation (27% to 12%)**
- In July 2021, a greater proportion of respondents also indicated that they don't need any more training right now (7% to 17%).



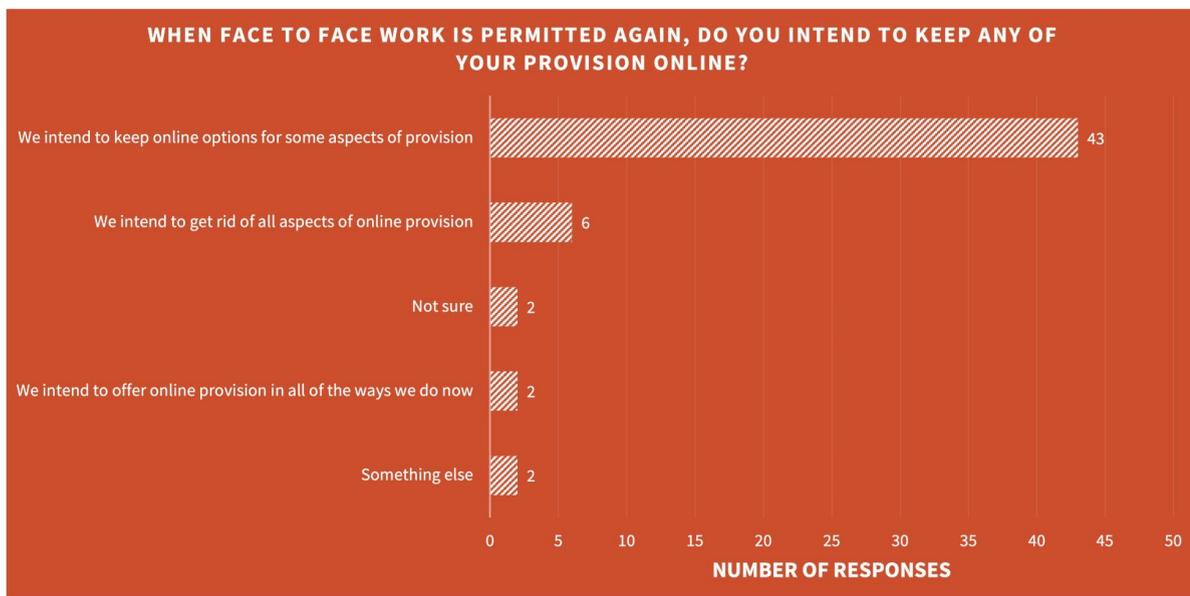
18 March 2021: When face to face work is permitted again, do you intend to keep any of your provision online?

The large majority of respondents (78%) reported that they intended to keep some aspects of their provision online, with specific reference to a **blended approach** for young people in the comments - offering both online and face-to-face activities. One person also commented that they intend to maintain

online provision for staff through a network of organisations working with young people. This builds on feedback from several previous surveys, which has indicated that digital provision has proved particularly valuable when facilitating peer networks and support for youth work practitioners.

4% of respondents intended to continue offering online provision in all of the ways that they currently were doing and, conversely, **11% expected to get rid of all aspects of online provision**. 4% were still unsure.

One organisation noted that they will be using evaluation to determine ‘where any aspects of online delivery are worth keeping.’ [Previous surveys](#) indicated that there are some particular areas where practitioners have felt digital delivery has been more effective (see more on this below).



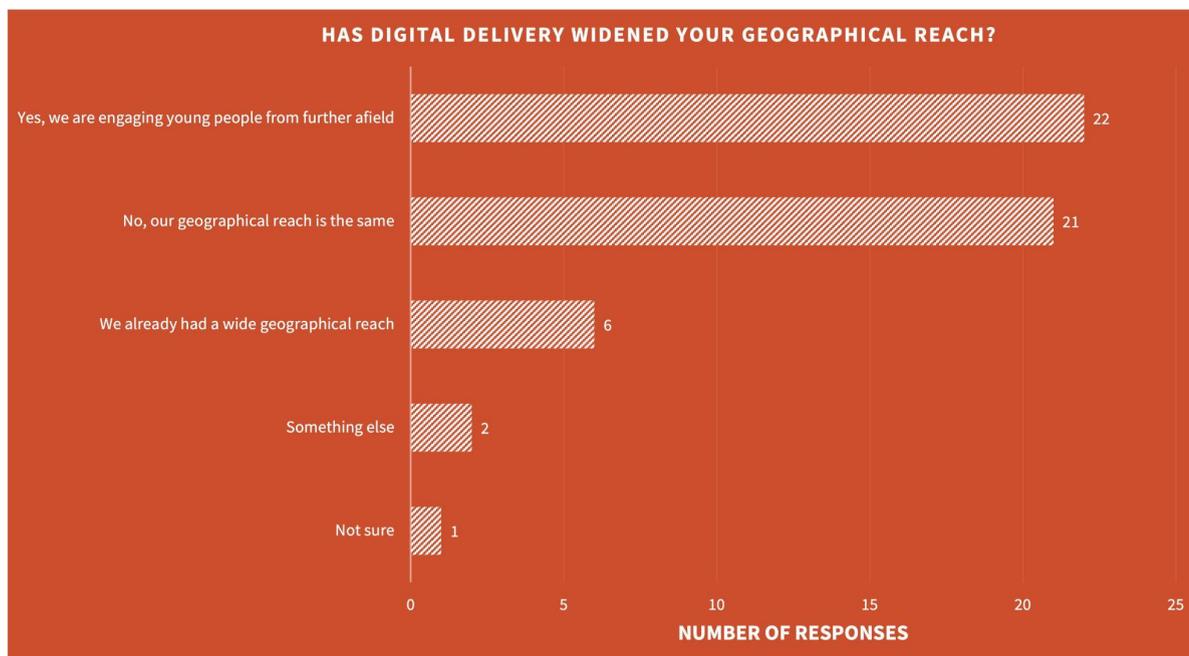
4 March 2021: Has digital delivery widened your geographical reach?

This survey indicated a fairly even split; 42% of respondents reported that they were now reaching young people from further afield, whilst 40% shared that their geographical reach had remained the same. 12% already had a wide geographical reach, and a small percentage didn't know or provided a different answer.

The potential for increasing reach in this way will naturally vary depending on an organisation's type of provision, capacity, and resources. One participant commented that their organisation's funding limits them to a particular geographical area, so they would not be able to widen their reach even if it was practically feasible to do so. Another participant did not do so much digital delivery, so this question was less applicable for them.

On the converse, one respondent shared that digital delivery had enabled them to develop links with projects from around the country, meaning that the young people they support are now joining online groups from other areas of the UK - and beyond. This had been supported by an increased ability to link staff up across geographical areas for networking (an opportunity that also came through clearly in a [previous survey](#) about areas of work that are working better online). Another person added that they have been engaging groups at an international level.

Finally, a wider geographical reach might not be based solely on digital provision - one participant commented that they have managed to increase capacity of locality based staff, which could also be said to increase their geographical reach.



19 February 2021: Are there any features of your remote provision that are working better than face-to-face delivery?

42% of all respondents reported that **none of their online provision was working better** than it would be were it being delivered face-to-face. Comments conveyed a general sense that whilst there were some benefits to online, such as reducing travel costs or increasing organisational capacity to deliver through lockdowns, most provision was better suited to being delivered face-to-face. However, there was also a general consensus that online is 'better than nothing', and most comments offered both positives and negatives to the current situation.

A number of respondents reported **specific activities that, in their experience, were working better online**. These include: family support (4%); group activities like sports, cooking or art (6%); peer-to-peer

support (8%); targeted group work - for example, with young carers (8%); and 1:1 support, counselling, or mentoring (12%). One person also added 'outreach and inclusion work', and another expanded with detail on their work with young carers:

“Work with young carers - less anxiety around leaving the house - less anxiety around joining a new provision - no outlay on travel. The number of young carers we support has increased exponentially.”

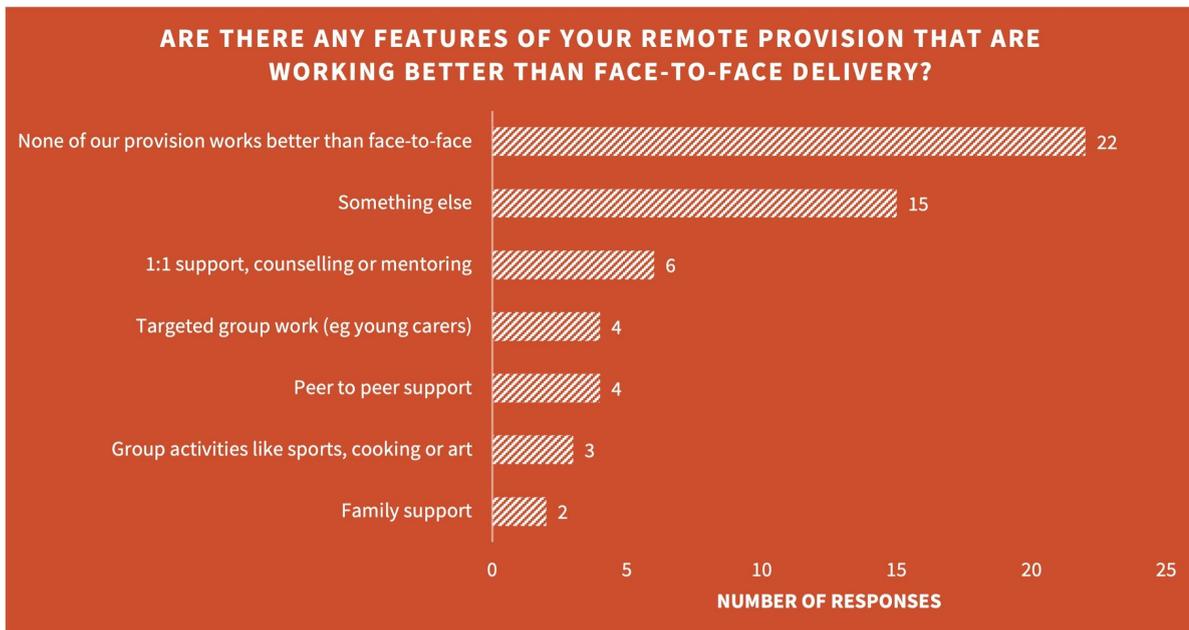
Another comment also reflected on 1:1 support, noting that 'there are some advantages to having less interruptions and more focussed time for individual support than in a regular, open session'.

However, they also highlighted 'lots of disadvantages', including lower engagement and less young people seeking support, and fewer opportunities for the day-to-day, responsive conversations that can provide young people with 'situational' support. The picture was definitely mixed, and practitioners reported varied experiences with and for the young people that they are working with.

Multiple additional comments noted that **moving online has increased opportunities and capacity for staff and volunteer training, and networking**. Particular benefits included: making training more accessible for volunteers 'who are scattered all over the UK'; allowing for bigger numbers in sessions; online sessions being easier to organise; the creation of new networks; and reduced travel costs. One person shared an intention to continue offering online training for volunteers even when face-to-face provision resumes.

Finally, there were a number of comments that highlighted some real benefits in terms of **increasing access to provision for young people**, noting that online activities had been reducing geographical and travel barriers, and barriers for young people with disabilities.

As might be expected, this survey demonstrated a clear desire to return to face-to-face once restrictions are eased and it becomes safe to do so, but there were also indications that practitioners will be retaining specific parts of online delivery that have been working well, particularly for specific groups of young people.



5 February 2021: Are the young people you work with experiencing ‘digital fatigue’?

In February 2021, with many young people back to attending school online during the day, and with large parts of youth provision having been hosted online for coming up to a year, we wanted to know whether ‘digital fatigue’ was something that youth practitioners were seeing from the young people with which they were working.

47% of respondents said ‘yes, they’re less keen on joining online activities with us now’, with a number of comments highlighted that the return to online schooling has contributed to this. Interestingly, one respondent reported the opposite - that online schooling meant the young people that they were working with were *more* likely to engage with digital youth provision.

For others, the fatigue was felt more generally - “It’s also restriction/lockdown fatigue in general not just digital”, particularly in areas where the restrictions have been more relentless over the past year. This comment, again, highlights the disparate way in which lockdown restrictions are realised across communities:

“Yes, some are, whilst others don’t have devices to get online with.”

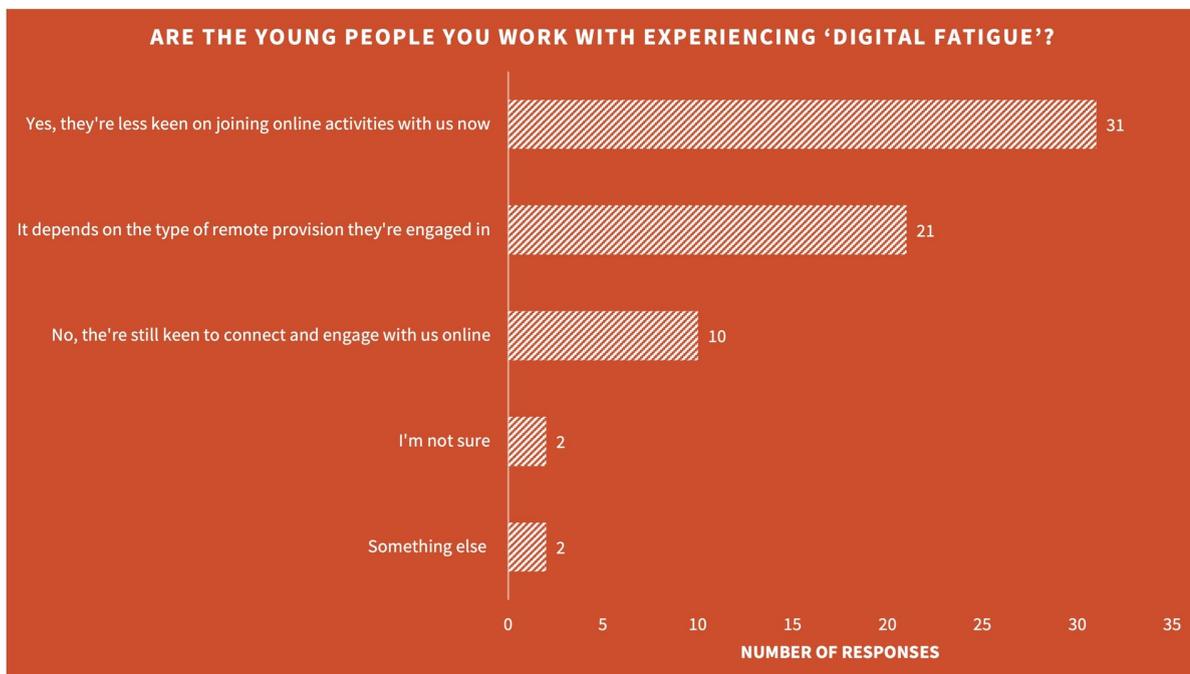
As would be expected, responding to and managing ongoing restrictions were clearly impacting adults and workers too; both in terms of finding the energy to engage online, and requiring a whole new set of skills and competencies, not only in navigating digital tools but also in using them creatively and ‘innovatively’.

32% of respondents did not give a clear-cut ‘no’, instead reporting that ‘it depends on the type of remote provision they’re engaged in.’ Many comments expanded on this response, noting that attendance and engagement varies between young people, and that it depended both on the specific activity (including nature and duration), and on how much time had already been spent online.

Others were noticing digital fatigue presenting in different ways - for example, young people being less likely to speak up or to have their video on when joining sessions online. One respondent noted how some are ‘thriving online’, whereas for others “it is exhausting, exposing.” Zoom and other video platforms change the space and dynamics of provision, with young people (and adults) often having to reveal more about their personal environments than they would otherwise have to.

15% of respondents said that the young people they are working with were “still keen to connect and engage with us online.” There was a recognition that “it wouldn’t be their preference”, but that whilst being tired of being online, they will still engage “where they feel it has value to them. For others, tuning in online was felt to be essential essential:

“[...] other young people depend on our sessions as their place to go to have some fun in a safe environment.”



25 September 2021: Has moving your provision online enabled you to reach/engage young people that you have never engaged before?

Digital barriers: building new relationships

43% of respondents had found that moving provision online had not enabled them to reach or engage with new young people. These respondents, however, were continuing to work with the same groups or individuals. A number of additional comments highlighted the limitations of digital provision when building new relationships, making it more appropriate as a tool for interacting with those young people who are already engaged. A further 34% found that it had enabled them to reach just a few young people who weren't already engaging with services.

Digital barriers: young people accessing online provision

Multiple practitioners told us that they were engaging with far fewer young people than before, sometimes losing those who did not like or were uncomfortable with online provision.

Whilst digital activities can reduce some barriers to access, such as geography and time, we continued to see the challenges shared in some of our earlier survey questions about moving services online: most notably limited and varying levels of access to internet or devices, and huge restrictions on finding safe spaces for young people to engage with digital provision. Practitioners were also having to continue adapting services in order to try to reach unengaged and often the most vulnerable young people.

'Massive potential'

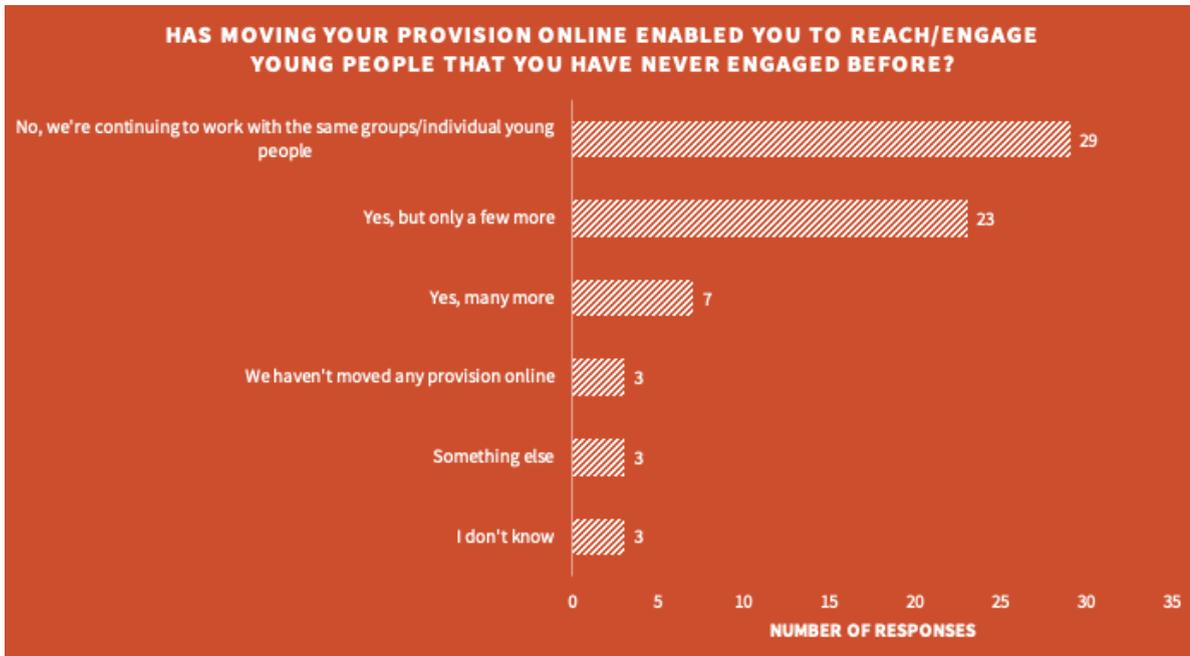
A small number of respondents found that online provision had enabled them to reach many more young people (10%). A few comments highlighted some specific benefits of digital services, such as enabling young people who do not get on well with peers to connect with other groups of young people, 'forming friendships and becoming a self help group'. Another felt there was 'a massive potential for online youth work, particularly around online gaming.'

Screen fatigue

However, as we surpassed six months of lockdown restrictions, there was a strong sense that young people were tiring (or had already tired) of digital provision, leading to decreased engagement levels. On top of this, with some face-to-face services resuming, digital work was no longer the only option.

Not applicable

4% of this survey's respondents have not moved any provision online, and a further 4% did not know whether the move has enabled them to reach young people with whom they were not engaging before.



29 May 2020: How consistent has engagement with your online offer been since lockdown started?

The largest majority of respondents told us that attendance numbers had stayed the same week on week (20 respondents - 41%). Conversely, similar numbers told us that attendance numbers were either dropping (10 respondents - 20%) or rising (9 respondents - 18%).

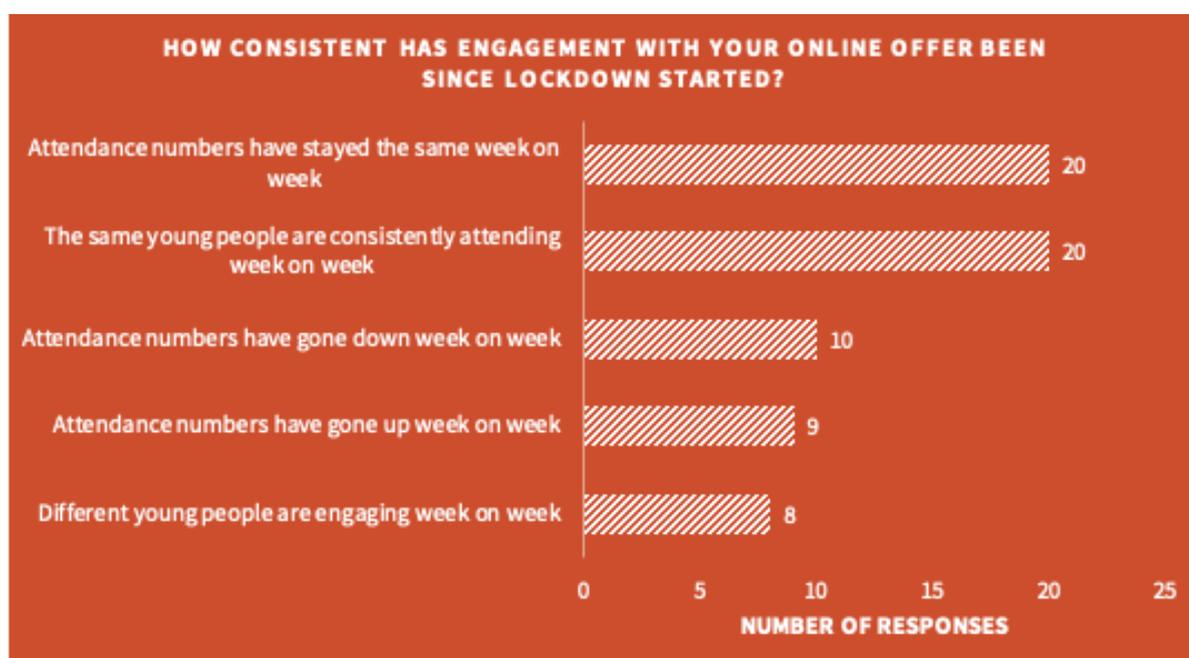
A greater number (20) reported **the same** young people consistently attending over time (41%), with the smallest proportion of respondents (8) telling us that they were seeing different young people engaging each week (16%).

Whilst the proportion was the same (41%), only 8 of those who told us that the same young people were consistently attending *also* said that attendance numbers had stayed the same - so it may be that in some cases, whilst the same young people are taking part over time, they are not always doing so regularly, or that whilst numbers are staying the same, it was a different group of young people engaging week on week.

To some extent engagement would depend on what type of digital opportunity is being provided; whether there is a regular schedule of events, if sessions were 'drop in', one-off, or require registration in advance, etc. You can see examples of the different types of services and activities that were being provided [here](#) (from the [Youth Work Support website](#)).

Others flagged challenges in building or maintaining relationships with young people - which will also influence the way in which young people engage with digital opportunities. Over time, this could become more of a challenge as relationships cannot be maintained online.

We also know that not all young people are equally able to engage online in the first place (both with youth provision and other supports - such as [online learning](#)). There are many changeable factors which could determine whether a young person is able to engage regularly, or at all. To draw more conclusions, we need more detailed insight into which young people are engaging, and how.



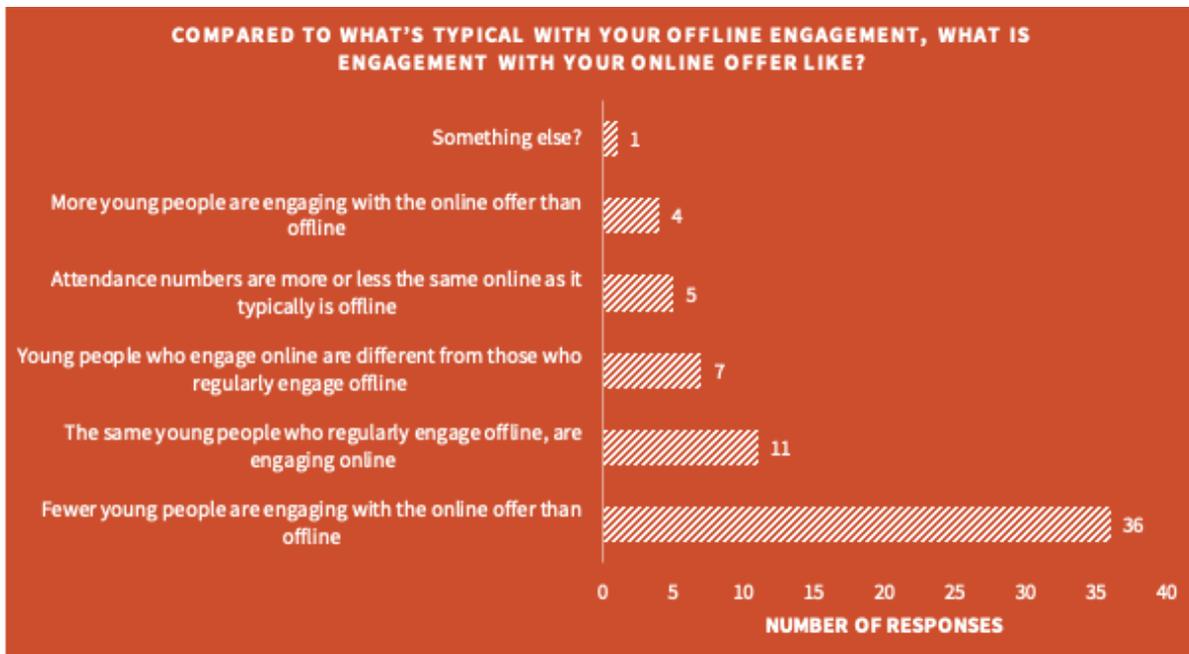
22 May 2020: Compared to what is typical with your offline engagement, what is engagement with your online offer like?

Given responses to previous questions and reports from the [wider sector](#), it's probably not surprising that the majority of respondents told us that fewer young people were engaging with an online offer than would normally be engaging offline (36 respondents - equivalent to 78% of those who took part). A small number reported that numbers were about the same (5 - 11%), or that **more** young people are now engaging online (4 - 9%). Reduced engagement and difficulty reaching young people has been repeatedly flagged as a challenge - and this clearly still stands - but it would be interesting to learn more about those who have found that moving services online has increased engagement.

11 respondents told us that those who were regularly engaging online were the **same** young people that would engage regularly offline (24%), whilst 7 stated that **different** young people are now engaging online (15%). Only 46% of respondents shared an answer about *who* was engaging online - this could be

for a variety of reasons and in hindsight, we think it might have been better to ask this question separately!

One respondent also shared that although engagement with online provision had been variable, young people were staying well connected through calls if not through online groups. This is an important point - whilst 90.6% of [data standard](#) respondents reported moving services online, 55.3% were also offering phone services, providing an alternative when there are challenges with online access. There are clearly differences in what can be done online versus via a phone and again, we think there is more to be explored here, especially as lockdown restrictions begin to ease and practitioners will be making decisions about which services to resume, and how.



15 May 2020: What is the biggest challenge that you are facing in moving your delivery online?

The challenge most commonly identified in moving delivery online was 'reaching young people', with 58% of respondents selecting this answer. This was in line with [other surveys and reports from the sector](#) at the time. Responses to the previous week's question had also indicated particular challenges around digital access (again, reinforced here with 68% highlighting challenges ensuring that young people have access to wifi or data, appropriate technology, or a suitable environment). 65% of respondents to the [youth sector data standard](#) also reported that they were reaching less than half of the young people they were engaging with before lockdown.

Digital skills, and online youth engagement/youth work skills, were also highlighted (28% and 23%) - again, in line with the previous week's top flagged need for practitioners supporting young people ("training for staff in specific skills, such as online facilitation or digital youth work"). This was coupled with a challenge in finding the time needed to produce online content and resources (28%), and calls attention to a need for staff within the sector to be supported in responding to the current context. A smaller number of respondents also flagged a challenge in ensuring that staff themselves have sufficient digital access (18%).

A small number of respondents flagged safeguarding challenges (8%), along with some ambiguity around what 'high quality looks like for online delivery' (20%). We have been exploring this further in our work on [youth work online](#).

